Answered Prayers and Willard Preachers

Adam Fieled

Cover image of Maria Gingerich
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Preface

My first full semester in State College was the fall of 1994. My first real girlfriend in State College was Kelly McCabe. She grew up in the Philly suburb Lansdale, a twenty-minute drive from Cheltenham (though when I visited her on holiday breaks, I would do so from Gulph Mills, where my family moved that fall). Kelly's interest in the arts was photography— she snapped a much-used picture of me sitting by a tree in one of the quad areas around North Halls, where we lived. We had both chosen to live in North Halls— it was the hip dorm, the artists' dorm, and the queer dorm. Kelly was 5'4 (average girl's height), chunky, and cherubic, with blonde hair and blue eyes. I used to liken her (drolly) to a Dutch milk-maid. I soon found a way of annoying the entire North Halls community— when I wasn't sitting in my room (322 Holmes) writing songs (which also requires one to open one's mouth and sing), I was in the Holmes basement pounding on the piano. The windows would've been open from both rooms. Where academic discipline was concerned in 1994, I was intermittently disciplined. Most of my most focused discipline went into writing songs, and, as of that autumn, at the behest of a stern cultural conscience, poetry and plays. I was certainly working as hard as any other PSU freshman, just on my own unique tangent.

The fall of '94 was an interesting time for rock music— Kurt Cobain was gone, and it looked like Billy Corgan and Courtney Love might move in to take his place; Amer-Indie was still ploughing away, and all the new Amer-Indie platters were always circulating around North Halls; and we were the first on campus to take heed of what "Brit-Pop" was. Plenty of the North Halls indie brats would laugh at me and my music— especially when I took out my Les Paul and played lead guitar. For those kids, the code-word for actual, substantial musical talent was "classic rock." I laughed at them right back. But because I knew and could play tons of Velvets songs (for instance), I'd wind up hanging with them too.

One pleasant surprise was that North Halls lived up to its reputation— it was a little, circumscribed world. I was always bemused by what East Halls was in relation to us— visiting East Halls being like visiting Kentucky. It was all football, jocks, Long Island tanning salon bitches and sleaze. The "circumscribed world" quality is what North and East Halls shared. Many of the other dorms, like West, Pollock, and South Halls, had a miscellaneous, grab-bag quality. All the dorms had the same food— and oh what food it was. I don't mean that completely ironically. The standard meat-and-potatoes American fare was spiced up with Mexican, Italian, and (occasionally) French imports; and everybody, even the indie brats, loved the ice-cream machines. I, in the fall of '94, happened to be a fastidious vegetarian freak (which faded later in the Nineties); and my food tastes were obscure in the extreme. But I didn't starve.

What Kelly captured with her camera was my stance before the world in '94— I was punkishly determined to be an artist at all costs. Swiftly, I broadened enough to have literary and theater aspirations, and was writing poems and plays. If only the Outlaws (Outlaw Playwrights) would produce one of my one-acts— that's what I wanted. All in the context of taking classes and doing homework like everyone else. Was I a bit much? Certainly. I even looked younger than my age. But North Halls was the right place at the right time for me, and us.

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One exciting aspect of living in North Halls was the dinners— not the food but the "meat market" aspect of Warnock Commons, and how far different residents would go to make themselves not only attractive but conspicuous at these meals. What could happen at dinner was always a perpetual highlight of each of our days— not just who sat with whom, but dialogues developed and trysts worked towards. On a tangent, though our dorm rooms were sardine-can small and cramped (leading to the endless grossness of sex-in-front-of-your-roommate, or, even worse and inversely, their sex in front of you), Warnock Commons was very deluxe— within an hour of dinner's conclusion, the snack bar opened and stayed open until ten or eleven. The group I fell into with Kelly McCabe instantly was punkish— a rough crowd for conformists or anyone not on our particular wavelength. One night in the fall of '95 (by which time Kelly had abandoned PSU and we'd lost track of her), my friend Jeremy and I decided to satisfy one of our punkish impulses and show up at Warnock Commons at dinnertime in drag (I wasn't wearing a beard and mustache then and could still pull this off). Nineties androgyny was Nineties revolution. We wimped out from doing this; it was too major a commitment, even for us.

We settled for the compromise of showing up at the snack bar in drag. Our friend Becca set us up with clothes— Becca, like Jeremy, was from the Pittsburgh area, and Becca and Jeremy had briefly gone out too. Nothing much happened at the snack bar; it turns out, we moseyed in and moseyed out. But I'd at least proven to myself that I could take certain exhibitionistic plunges, and participate in Nineties revolution. One paradigmatic change which shook North Halls in the fall of '95 was a full-scale "hippie invasion." Suddenly, North Halls was not only artists, other cultural types and queers but Phish-fixated, Frisbee throwing, shroom-imbibing suburban hippie types. They all lived in unisex Leete Hall (Holmes was all male and Runkle, all female) and were always hanging out outside— they were difficult to avoid. Sometimes, I'd write songs in the Leete basement as well as Holmes, and one of the hippie girls from the Philly 'burbs would come down and smoke me up (or smoke me out, as they say on the west coast). As I found out years later, a good amount of the weed around North Halls (and all over the east coast) was laced— leading to the odd vista of suburbanite, day-tripping, middle-class hippies tripped out on PCP for years at a time.

North Halls being what it was, the artists, cultural types, queers and hippies all wound up getting high together— though the hippies weren't punkish enough to dress in drag. Our lives were no longer unmolested by authorities— Becca and Mandee got busted for pot possession and had to appear in court. I noticed then (and later experiences in New York and Philly proved this true) that I have a natural aptitude for evading authority, and not getting nailed for my transgressions. Becca and I were funny that semester— we slept in the same bed number of times (both before and after the authorities at PSU separated her from Mandee and she was forced back to Runkle) without hooking up; whereas Mandee and I hit each other and ran. Most of us were being slightly decadent about our academic work (and in the early Aughts I did harsh penance for this)— Jeremy wasn't. He was always up shit's creek if he went out too much, and he wouldn't get high. We repeated our drag trick a few times (once on Halloween, if I remember correctly), and I learned the vagaries of walking around in pumps. Girls: is it really worth it?

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State College in the Nineties had quirks, and North Halls had quirks too. You'd think we wouldn't go to frat parties, but we did. The rules for Thursday, Friday, and Saturday nights were pretty laissez faire and, where parties were concerned, anything was fair game. Frat parties were never that much

fun for me personally. I developed a taste for hard alcohol fast in State College, rather than beer. Of course, you couldn't get a Jack n' Coke at a PSU frat party; you could only hit the keg like everyone else. They'd almost always have Bob Marley and the Wailers blasting, or an alternative-covers band set up in the living room (by the time I left State College even I'd played a few frats). We usually didn't stay long. In State College, lots of people lived in raunchy, ugly high-rise apartment buildings and complexes, which made the small town seem semi-urban; the parties in these domiciles were bizarre, too. The apartments tended to be little more than studio size— and they'd try to do the whole "kegger" set-up in them. Our main priority was usually to find someone to share their dope with us, if we weren't carrying ourselves. Stoned or not, party-hopping in the dead of winter in State College was onerous; we had to face the long-ass walk back, late at night and stoned or drunk, to North Halls. We usually stopped at Ye Olde College Diner (known to everyone in SC as just "the Diner") first, which was open all night, and where we'd get coffee to warm and sober up. Thankfully, the dorms did have central heating.

On Sundays, we were generally zombies; and few North Halls residents could get excited about football games. Many of us got through our years in State College without ever making it to a PSU game. The big campus chant ("We are/ Penn State!") never made it up to North Halls. As has been mentioned elsewhere, we lived in high-minded ignorance of Joe Paterno and everything he represented, in our own alternate universe. As winter turned to spring, North Halls turned scenic— beyond being the most individualistic of the dorms, it was also the smallest (three halls), and the quads were large and green. You could sit outside in March and April and enjoy yourself. As spring sprung, there were all kinds of festivals and mini-festivals, official and unofficial, around North Halls, too, including Northstock, which was usually held on the converted basketball courts and which featured some import bands and some musicians (like myself) who also lived in North Halls. None of the other dorms had anything like Northstock, to my knowledge; and if you decided to light up outside (which we did), the authorities might kindly decide not to notice. In fact, State College in spring and summer was a fantastic place to get stoned in peace— the quaint sections of the town and campus (like North Halls) could become beatific with the right dope around; and it was unlikely that anything would come along to make you paranoid. To get caught out, you'd have to be blatantly profligate (which Becca and Mandee, unfortunately, were); a reasonable amount of discretion could always save the day.

It also became difficult, in North Halls during the spring months, to maintain even intermittent academic discipline (by spring '96, I'd managed to establish a low maintenance level of such discipline, barring courses in my major, philosophy, which I was diligent about); everyone wanted to be outside. For some reason, the spring of '96 was particularly intense, partly because North Halls suddenly had a line in to getting as much pot as we wanted, and many of us were being more promiscuous than usual. The energy had real fertility and hopefulness in it, and it was difficult not to feel hopeful then. It was a brief moment of unmolested peace.

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Indie State College was a real place. From the spring of 1996 forward, I dwelt in it at least part of the time (until I left State College in late 1998). The rules were the rules— to gain entrance into the charmed circles, certain prerequisites had to be met. Obviously, you had to pledge allegiance to independent rock music, to at least some extent, and not just the local stuff. Folkways in these circles deemed most commercial (corporate) rock music detritus; however, the Alternative

Revolution had created a context in which indie bands like Sonic Youth could be signed to major labels and maintain credibility, so by the mid-Nineties in State College opinions were fluid on that level. Holding on to vinyl and having a vinyl record player was an inestimable advantage; and vinyl was not only hip but cheap. State College was tiny enough that all the charmed circle indie kids would be listening to the same records at the same time— and one facet of the State College indie scene I appreciated, and which wasn't replicated in other cities' scenes, was a scholarly attitude towards the history of rock music. It wasn't conservative, but preservative; and it meant you could be just as au currant with the Chocolate Watch Band or Love's second album with *Orange Skies* on it as with Spiritualized or Guided by Voices.

Some tastes particular to State College I didn't share, like Robyn Hitchcock and shoe-gazer bands; but the State College guys would sit and bullshit with you for hours on end if you had half-decent musical tastes. Although I liked Guided by Voices, for a long time my major hinge to these guys was Big Star and Nick Drake. The Big Star discourses, especially, went round and round in a million circles, and I carried them to NYC and Philly and straight into the new century. State College hipster-ism wasn't extreme; and you could still like the Beatles, Stones, Hendrix, etc. These guys were scholars— they would consider anything. What was frowned upon (unusually) was just listening to your friends and your friends' bands; people with catholic tastes actually got along better, which was perfect for me. Like many scholars, these guys weren't necessarily ambitious— they weren't on a quest for world domination. They could be clannish— you couldn't push your way into the circles. In many ways, they were quaint, like the nicer bits of State College itself. The White Lodge, where many Amer-Indie bands passed through, was also quaint; set on the edge of a forest with a highway running on the other side of it. The way the White Lodge was run influenced the Philly Free School shows at the Highwire— there was free booze around a good part of the time, and the vibe was warm and congenial.

What influenced State College indie even more was that the scene produced no conquering heroes on a national or international level; which meant that, even if it didn't have that high a profile, social climbing was kept to a minimum. What I remember most distinctly are the records I borrowed to try and get into, having caught and internalized the scholar's curiosity— I couldn't get into late-era Byrds or Gram Parsons, or Richard Thompson; but I acquired a taste for Pulp and solo Brian Eno which I've never lost. State College indie was so mellow I was stunned by the Machiavellian gymnastics in other scenes I participated in later on. If I did cross swords with the State College indie crowd, it was for this reason— the players were extraordinarily intelligent, bordering on brilliant, but semi-comatose, as can happen in small towns, nonetheless. They were not only pot-heads but acid trippers, and I tripped with them. I learned: you haven't been frightened until you've heard *Pink Moon* on acid. The creepy underbelly of State College's quaintness revealed itself when I tripped— and the indie crews, despite their low-key brilliance, could be creepish. Maybe that's why I stuck to *3rd/Sister Lovers* and *Pink Moon* so much in State College— that dark underbelly was my favorite part of the town, and scene.

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The story of me and the Outlaw Playwrights is another funny one; and, oddly enough, it begins with music. In the fall of '94, many of the theater department queen bees were living in North Halls. The first mini-festival I played was backing up my friend Jason Liebman; he was playing his songs on an acoustic, and I was playing lead on my Les Paul behind him, in a converted North Halls lounge in Warnock Commons. In dramatic, diva-like fashion, one of the theater girls draped herself over a

chair and made eyes at us. When the set was over, she gave us a rap— not only about the theater department, but about what Outlaw Playwrights was. Jason didn't seem interested but, having some theater experience, my ears perked up. Outlaw Playwrights did seem to be one of the few hinges the theater department had to reaching a wider public than just theater majors— every Thursday night at eleven p.m., they put up a student or graduate student written one-act play, in a context open to the general public, down in the bowels of the theater building near North Halls, in a black box theater space. Another Nineties revolution signifier.

The problem was, I thought I could go and be inconspicuous; I was wrong. Maybe because everyone from North Halls knew me for my music; maybe because I'd done Carnegie Mellon Pre-College for drama in the summer of '92, and one of my fellow pre-college students was now in the PSU drama department, and thus some kind of rep preceded me; I felt gawked and pawed at instantly. The first time I went to Outlaws in late '94, I got awful butterflies. This quickly became a tradition— for my four years in State College, I couldn't descend into those theater building bowels without feeling like I'd just been struck by a polo mallet. Without wanting to be smarmy or obvious, Outlaws was always a very dramatic experience for me. As of early '95, I was feverishly writing one-acts; but Outlaws was clannish— I still wasn't socially connected enough to get my plays up there. In late '95, I managed to get Nick Dobson's play, called *The Gut*, up; that was a decent first step; but it wasn't until (literally) my twenty-first birthday in '97 that one of my one-acts went up.

Luckily, '97/'98 saw a kind of regime change. "Outlaws, the Next Generation" was much more germane to me than the original crew, who were immersed in a good amount of pride and prejudice just because I wasn't actually a theater major. By 1999, I was in New York, and they'd produced four of my one-acts, usually unthinkable for anyone but a theater major. It's also true that, by late '98 when I left State College, I was in good standing enough with the theater kids to be invited to their parties, which were at a huge tangent to State College indie parties. Theater parties at PSU were like little staged plays themselves; different arranged scenes and interactions played themselves out. If one of the major divas decided to "shotgun" you, it was an event. The theater kids had odd taste in music, too, like Soul Coughing. I could go to their parties, but I never got particularly comfortable with them; the unease element never changed. Getting stoned with them was a surreal experience, for that reason— I knew it couldn't be that comfortable. Perhaps it was because, as I sensed, they weren't that comfortable with themselves. I still don't know why they couldn't get loose, especially the first gen theater crew, who, from what I saw, lived their lives as if they were staged by Ionesco. Theater-obsession is difficult to turn off for the theater-obsessed.

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The poem *Le Chat Noir* from my book *Posit* is about an actual black cat. Few in America would remember what the original Le Chat Noir ("The Black Cat") was— a hotspot in decadent 1890s Paris, where denizens like Toulouse-Lautrec would indulge in absinthe, opium, and filthily erogenous, transgressive sexual intercourse, straight or queer. Of all the places in America to replicate the richly sleazy vibe of Le Chat Noir, State College, Pennsylvania would not seem to be high on the list— most would say New Orleans or San Francisco (among others) first. I wasn't able to visit New Orleans or San Francisco in the late Nineties; maybe they did have their own Le Chat Noir replicant. But, oddly, State College in the Nineties did also have its own Le Chat Noir— it was called, simply enough, the Coffee Cellar, and to descend into the Cellar (it was below street level,

adjacent a tacky take-out pizza joint) was to submerge yourself in a subterranean realm where there were no limits or bounds, no bottom. Of course, there was a major difference between the Cellar and Le Chat Noir— the Cellar served coffee, rather than booze. But, importantly, the Cellar was tolerant of substances brought in; in other words, you could smoke whatever you wanted to over your coffee; and it didn't even have to be in the black-painted, mirror-laden bathroom that you did so. A deals hothouse.

Needless to say, the sexual raunch at the Cellar was also intense— mostly because the less green of the teenage townie girls made it their home away from home. Many of them considered themselves "Goth" or "vampires"— they smoked clove cigarettes and wore fetish boutique clothing. I myself liked to wear black leather pants and a Celtic Cross at the time. People had different ways of passing time at the Cellar— because we were often stoned, time tended to pass strangely. There was an acoustic piano, some kind of quiz-game machine, and a little stage where artists occasionally performed. I spent most of my time writing— during the fall of '98, I was spewing out an attempt to meld poetry and theater, which was later compressed into a one-act called *Mortuary Puppies* and produced by the Outlaws in '99 while I was in New York. It was a strange place to fall in love, but I did fall in love with someone at the Cellar. Not all of the townie girls, including the Goths and vampires, were brats— and many of the scenes started at the Cellar were continued elsewhere. As the fall of '98 progressed, things at the Cellar got looser and looser— not only were there heroin rings created and oriented around the place, acid and E were easy to find, too. The days and nights could catch fire at any time.

As is worth mentioning, the place was dimly lit (even during daylight hours, owing to its windowless place below street level, though the front glass façade let in some light), had low ceilings and amounted to a long, narrow strip; regulars like myself usually sat towards the back. The little stage wasn't closed off; there were tables on it. The strip was long enough that if you lit a joint at the book, the staff wouldn't necessarily be able to smell the smoke at the front. Not that they'd care if they did smell the smoke. The black-out bathroom could be a trip when you were stoned; it was large and spacy for the long, narrow room, and couples often went into it to hook up— the effect was half Poe, half Sixties London. I was once tripping balls enough to get caught in there for half an hour, not knowing or being able to remember where I was. If there was a deficit in comparison with the original Le Chat Noir, it was that the Cellar closed early, at ten or eleven, and there were no bohemian bars in State College. The bar scene, in fact, was as pure Paterno as it could be. If we adjourned elsewhere, it was to someone's flat, or house; many of which were equipped to extend the nights well into the morning hours.

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The center of State College proper consisted of two parallel streets, College and Beaver (Ave.), both of which were comprised of strips of restaurants, bars, book and record stores, knick-knack/paraphernalia places, and, at the far end of College Ave. near South Halls, McLanahan's, the great all-purpose semi-supermarket outlet for PSU students. The side streets running perpendicular to College and Beaver were more of the same, with an emphasis on bars and pricier eateries. The Coffee Cellar was also on one of these side streets. As has been mentioned, the bar scene in Nineties State College was stagnant; hang-out places for jocks, would-be jocks, and middle-of-the-road types. Away from the two-street strips, State College was structured very much like a typical American

suburb; street after street of middle-class consonant houses; that was the surface layer. But many of the middle-class consonant houses amounted to boarding houses for PSU students and young State College residents, including townies— and they (myself included by '98) tended to live in clusters. House-party culture in late Nineties State College depended on these clusters— for months or years, a house could establish itself (occasionally an apartment worked too) as a happening party venue, and receive the elite of the State College hipsters and bohemians every time it opened its doors.

The most fortuitous house-strip was always West College Ave., where the houses were capacious enough to comfortably hold a hundred guests and a band. When I first began to attend these parties in 1995, they weren't particularly elaborate; possibly a keg or band, just people hanging out. By '98, a new baroque era of State College house parties had set in— often there'd be a nitrous tank, which meant free (or cheap) whippets; and, in '98, you could get not only pot at these soirees but imported hash and opium. The pace at these parties was usually leisurely— people would wander in and out. The social mores were not particularly rigid in these contexts either— even though the indie kids and townies tended to dominate the action. On West College, sometimes you'd see indie kids, jocks, and middle-of-the-roaders together— there were crossroads involving music and drugs where everyone could and did converge. One of the biggest Madame Verdurin salon/ house party locales was run by two guys who weren't particularly indie kids— it was colloquially known as "Bob n' Rob's." In '98, their house parties were the biggest, and most lavish. Everyone went, and met, and mingled, and I knew the truth even then— for the indie kids to get the drugs (especially pot and hash) they wanted, they had to "play the game" just like everyone else. Bob n' Rob imposed their version of Machiavellian politics on the indie crowd, and the indie crowd just had to accept it.

So, we all endured the middling music being played and the kegged out ambience, and even the Guided by Voices acolytes stood in the big lines with smiles on their faces. Truth be told, it wasn't that squeamish— the Bob n' Rob set-up wasn't all Dave Mathews Band and sports trivia. There was, in those days, a specific kind of ska-listening State College hipster who walked a fine line between cultural snobbery and the broad interests (including sports and beer) of an Everyman; Bob n' Rob were archetypal examples. They were hybrids. I got in line and drank the beer. For me, quite honestly, it was more about gawking at Rob's girlfriend, who I was half in love with. On good nights, we could migrate from Bob n' Rob's to something else going on. House parties weren't particularly tight in State College in those days— there would always be some middle-of-the-roaders around. It was to our credit that, among us, no one cared that much, or played possum about it.

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This pdf collects the best of what I wrote in State College between 1995 and 1998. If I used 1999 in the title, it is because *Mortuary Puppies*, written in '98, was not produced until I had departed from State College in 1999. My early, brief, tempestuous marriage to Jennifer Strawser is prominently placed; Maria Gingerich, on the cover, puts in a memorable appearance too. The fact that libertinism ran semi-rampant in State College in the Nineties, as a manifestation of a social revolution that overtook a large chunk of the United States then, is worth underscoring as a determinative factor in making it so that I could develop adequately as a scribe. A more constricted life would've cramped me and held me down. The title, *Answered Prayers and Willard Preachers*, compels me to explain that Willard Building, on the PSU campus, was a major academic hub. In the Nineties, Gary Cattell was a local reverend who would preach outside the Willard Building, to anyone who would listen. If you felt like dialoguing with Mr. Cattell, you could do so, so that raw jeremiad situations became more like *Crossfire*, as seen on TV. The Nineties.

For someone recollecting Nineties State College in tranquility, my development as a writer, from apprentice-level into assured competence, is the most major legacy of my years there. The taste for small college towns, and small college town life, is like any other taste. Some have it, some very much do not. For whatever reason, small town college life in the Nineties, in a small college town that fed solidly in an ancillary way to Philadelphia and New York, was able to kick my ass into the kind of gear that would make steady gradual progress, over several years, possible. So that *Answered Prayers and Willard Preachers* has at least some hinge to being juvenilia, especially pursuant to imitative exercises in relation to French Symbolists Rimbaud and Baudelaire. But, I would maintain, likable juvenilia, companionable juvenilia, and also some fully developed pieces that can resonate in a well-rounded way today. Not to mention the wholesome influence of Central Pennsylvania, as terrain that exudes a palpable sense of earth magic, enchantment in greenery, which can only bode well for individuals determined to develop themselves under its eco-systems.

Nefertiti

To the blonde, cigarette dangling from
red lips in the blue Chevette— in a past life
I courted you in Egypt, we danced, your
neck like Nefertiti's as furiously we made
love— lived together, also, in Pompeii, & your
volcanic thighs took me sky-high. Now, here
you are again, pale cool flat diamond
eyed, I am ravishing you, we never think
of New Jersey, murder, mortuaries, what's
ugly, fleeting, as the light goes green it
is all in the set-ness of your face forever—
frissons, fireworks in someone's mind.

September 1996, College Avenue, State College

Basement: Philadelphia Museum of Art: Summer 1996

for Ernestine Rubin

Art, it would seem, is a nice way of
saying that everything resides in hell—
the pictures are anguish— the negatives,
hiding somewhere, ecstasy.

Pictures mounted on plain grey walls.
Slow viewers puzzle themselves; sashay,
bug-like, into corners. I am not,
unfortunately, basking in the open glow of
abundant creativity, but am thrashed
by a sense of impotence. How do I
let the images in? The blonde over
there: does she do penance by giving
head? Fractions, pinpoints of light distill
from a low ceiling— footsteps, cacophony
of breaths being drawn. Eyes of an
artist, mine of a bloodhound. Staid types sniff the walls.

Art, it would seem, is
a nice way of saying that everyone
resides in hell— the people are anguish—
the angels, hiding somewhere, ecstasy.

July 1996, Arden Road, Gulph Mills

Room 510, Atherton Hilton

Lightning illuminates the pale sky; rain
on the leaves sounds like waves. Snakes
rattle across the Earth, hold themselves
erect under the onslaught. Your body,
Jennifer— lax against a pillow, aghast
at the finality of clouds. Lampshades
are tan mushrooms— wallets stuffed
with obscure currencies. Some stray
Ruth may (later) come to wound me.
Swim for your life, junk-in-the-veins
Narcissus— Rimbaud is just a button
to push, guided by voices or not. Our
face of passion is one we had before we were born.

July 1996, Atherton Hilton, State College

Revelation from Holmes Hall

I escaped a father I hated, broke
from Moses, his Commandments,
shunned synagogue machinery,
slipped past esoteric Torah, hid
in recesses of a flat white satin
wall (Jennifer, her loins), dreamed
our future for the Universe—

I fathered a Bible-less expanse, yellow
leaves fell, rain coated, I dawdled,
fumbled, waited for lightning or roses,
circles drew me down to implore these
roots: Buddha, Yahweh, Adonai,
Christ, Mohammed, the escaped father

lives, impersonal, diurnal, this
the refuse of his wisdom I partake
of, dreaming no future for myself
past what modes of suffering are
encompassed outside a third-story
window on a night when Jennifer
rounds the Universe off to a third, out—

October 1996, North Halls, State College

To Baudelaire

Mama's boy! Compassionate,
ridiculous, dandified cunt!
Right minded, wrongheaded,
unwed slave and parasite!
No poets go to Hell— God
be with you, vulgar and
adorable prick! May your
tarted up, ice-pick nose-pick tales
grow into a grin in the ether!

You immortal artist you—
we remember, who have
been in New Jersey at midnight,
no girls, nothing to do,
sitting through thunders, hurricanes,
what it is to be bored, "to ennui"—
to sling a black coat over our
shoulders, stroll streets in paroxysms,
then into ecstasy, devilish slumbers,
out again into the ocean— we remember thee.

October 1996, North Halls, State College

A Dream

The night, as I recall it,
was moonless. An
ambiance of demonic
enchantment hung
heavy over grey
concrete parking lot.
It was a carnival of
dead souls, ghost-wedding,
vampire funeral. No
rides, cotton candy,
starlit skies, carousels,
only shades of sniffing
bloodhounds, consumptive
spaces, conglomerations;
strange animal glamour
of spilled blood. Deep
implications of hell, chills.
I awoke: thunder crackled
over the trunks of trees.

July 1996, Arden Road, Gulph Mills

Fire

Out of void nothingness, a woman
arose before me with incandescent
ivory skin; she said, "I will be yours,
worship you, make you incisive with
the vast, monstrous power of my
body; you will worship me, we shall
die together evening by evening." I
embraced her silence, did not kill it
following, kissed her, we died together
then. She lifted her body, stood by the
window in the white/blue room, night
blackened against us. She said, "I
have encompassed you, scribed you,
you will never find me in you again."
I pleaded her, fell upon her with kisses,
caresses, all in vain. Her name was
Fire, she told me, left me, never again
appeared. I sit, write, pierce what flames
still leap out of void nothingness— she
ornaments the darkness somewhere, burning.

October 1996, North Halls, State College

De Profundis

The only reason I'm writing this is because I have no fucking choice. I don't usually use expletives, but in this situation one is appropriate. It's early April and the clocks have sprung forward; it's almost eight and still reasonably light. I was outside a minute ago, but now I'm in this library sitting next to a brick wall that I wish were a window. I could move, I could find another seat, but I won't because I'm a masochist and that's how God made me. I believe in God and always have. I don't know if I like Him or Her or It.

I'm just counting the minutes until I can sleep again. I do not know what is motivating me to write. Eight tolls of the bell. I am not dead yet and I don't know if I'm alive; something in me lives but only because I wish it to. I want to be held and I don't want to be fatalistic. I want to kiss and be reinfused with faith. I want to have fun, enough so that when life gets lonely again I can spitefully tell myself *You had your fun*. It's a habit I have, spitefully saying things to myself. I constantly wonder if I suffer too much or not enough. I am dominated by suffering but not time. Time is my clay. I am determined to fashion a life of meaning, painful meaning, from it.

I could sit here all night. If I sit here long enough, I could break through the layers of my surface unrest to find the white round pearl of my suffering knotting my throat. I may do so; I may not. A face, now a voice, passes through my mind, and I am startled. No! Not her. I don't know her. I wish many things. Wishes hurt. They are not fun. Santa is a sadist. Do not tell him what you wish for; he doesn't want to hear it. I don't put much stock in holidays anyway. Nothing changes. Nothing is changing now, too; it must be a holiday. I declare this to be Inertia Day 1995. We will all celebrate by complaining of our directionless lives. Hallmark will bring out a line of cards; blank cards. Of course, no mail will be delivered.

Enough of that; I've carried the joke far enough. I'm sorry; I was just trying to stay amused. I find that my amusement always seems to end much too fast. I'm dejected. There's nothing for me here or at home. I need a lover and I am 19, supposedly the peak of my sexual capabilities. There is a female on this campus who makes my heart stop dead. DEAD! Strips me bare. BARE! I think about her so fervently that I must use my hands as pacifiers. I'm frightened of her, and vice versa. Circumstances are not extenuating. I've felt this for months, and nothing has changed, and may continue not to. She has shortly cropped blonde hair. How I'd love to run a single hand through it. She sounds like Joan Crawford. She makes me think inarticulate thoughts. I want to baby her. It would probably be advisable to meet her before I try.

What do I do about this? Give me an opportunity, God. My dignity as artist and man is diminishing with each whispered lamentation. My thoughts are not grandiose: a flaxen head, a spill of blood, imagined moans. God, you sent me this plague. I demand an explanation. If I am too young to make this manifest, what does it portent? Madness? More loneliness? This could conceivably go on forever. I'm not going to jump from a window. I live in a room that has a screen preventing me from doing so. I am not sitting near a window now; I'm sitting next to a brick wall. I'm going to have to live my life tomorrow, too, and the day after. Why are eons encapsulated in a single cold April night? No birds are singing and she is not here. Help me understand, God; why don't I see myself in trees, flowers, grass; why don't these things reflect me? They are like airplanes or factories, just points in the visual landscape. Nature kindles no joy in me. Nature is cruel and very unusual. I

am disgusted with my own discipline that binds me to this pen and keeps me from relaxing.

I have not relaxed today. I fear I've lost the talent. I used to be prodigious, then decided to be an artist. Art is *something*, nothing else. That's all: no presuppositions, no posturing. I do know that if we saw ourselves adequately reflected by nature, we wouldn't need art. Nature is crude and unlovely. A branch does not amuse, a leaf does not stimulate desire: we do. We are dedicated followers of no one. I call myself Artist because it has more letters than Adam. Besides, am I Adam? Nothing springs from my ribs but disillusionment. I don't mean to be cutely cynical. Lots of people are into cute cynicism. Cynicism looks cute because it is babyish, it never grows. Now I'm going to direct my energies into the active elimination of the memory of having created an aphoristic phrase. I feel better already. I feel almost worthy to be loved. The lousy haircut I got today doesn't bother me anymore because I know that appearances are a ruse. Are bullets and beer forms of wisdom?

These are painful days, and I do not concede my right to complain. Creative self-pity is the basis of Art. I love nothing more than my pity for myself. Nine tolls of the bell. It's probably completely dark outside now. Me and my brick wall are sticking together. We have a healthy relationship. We are not mutually interdependent. We have adopted a non-violent approach to our relative closeness. I'm too young for all of this. I should be doing what young people do. This desk: a pirate ship! This wall: a much coveted treasure! My loneliness: grosser than Hamlet's!

I wouldn't deny myself the boastful privilege of saying I try to know how to listen, what to listen for. Everybody thinks Art is supposed to be graceful. Everything lovely is jagged and sharp. Grace is a myth. *Content* cannot be graceful. Who leads a graceful life? The ones who slide by on surfaces, seemingly unscathed? I mean, I always want to assume that all great artists are moralists, but obviously that's a false assumption. God, this is getting vague. I've got to go on. If I'm too young to love, I'm also too young to stop. It's demoralizing to think about the time when stopping starts. The fantasy I'm having is of her reading this and being so overwhelmed by my caustic wit and biting satire that she takes off her clothes. Even the suggestion is painful. In fact, everything is painful. Does anyone remember what being young is like? The fear, the continual fear, hanging on every moment, every breath? Does urgency fade with age?

I have created tonight and I am creating right now. I will continue to do so, even though I don't know where I'm going. I'm trying to listen for the next impulse and it will come. I'm allowed to reject it if I want because another will follow. The most inspiring thing for an Artist is that *there's always something more to be afraid of.* I will not repeat myself unless I feel the need to do so. I do not feel the need to do so. I swallow.

April 1995, Pattee Library, State College

Dada Circus

(A man in black ambles slowly and deliberately onstage, possibly bearing roses. He seats himself in a chair at a table stage left. His name is James Douglas.)

J: Everything's a fight these days. We've got to fight evil! Fight racism! Free the Tibetan monks! Help the Bosnians with money, blood, sweat and tears! I see kids walking around today wearing army jackets from some thrift-store, and you know it doesn't mean a thing to them. The kids aren't fighting; it's the Baby Boomers, that's who's at the heart of our modern malaise! They know damn well that they had it better than any generation in American history— no world wars and no AIDS. I, personally, identify with these kids today. But then, I'm young at heart. (violent knock at the door) Probably someone soliciting for some goddamned Mothers Against Drunk Driving— (James opens the door to find three men in nothing but boxer shorts— Elmer, Homer, and Omar)

E: Are you James Douglas?

J: Are you a homosexual?

E: No sir— we are Elmer!

H: Homer!

O: And Omar!

E, H, O: (in unison) We're a pseudo-quasi-ersatz-alterna-white-funk-Chili Pepper rip off band!

J: Chili Pepper wha…?

E: Could you please let us in, sir? We're freezing.

J: Why the hell should I let you hoodlums into my humble abode?

E: Did you not hear us? We are Elmer!

H: Homer!

J: Alright, alright, come in. (they enter) Now what the hell are you doing here? I ain't givin' any money to no charity!

E: We're from the Society for the Humane Treatment of Overused Undergarments, and if you don't clothe us, we'll have to shampoo you (holding up Pert-Plus bottle).

O: Have you ever witnessed an Oriental Shampoo attack? It isn't pleasant.

(E, H, O form a circle around James, shampoo their hands)

J: (nervously) Do you boys like paintings? I could give you one in lieu of clothes— I'm an artist too!

H: Really?

O: Far out? We can't shampoo this guy! (the circle disperses)

J: Alright, now get the hell outta here.

E: We're naked and it's freezing— have you no compassion?

J: No! I ain't got no come, and I ain't got no passion! (grabbing them) Now git! (slams shut the door) Y' know, they say what doesn't kill you makes you stronger. They'll find clothes, and they'll be stronger for having suffered. Just between you and me, I know this is some artsy-fartsy play. I know you're watching me, and I don't like it. It's Orwellian. What do you want me to do, jumping jacks? (starts doing jumping jacks) Now this is character development! This is transformation! I am in the moment! I am playing the lines! I am playing the lines! (he stops) Alright, now I'll sit here and wait. (violent knock at door). Probably another naked rock band…

(James opens the door to find a man in a Richard Nixon Halloween mask. We'll call him Dick.)

D: Trick or treat?

J: Is it Halloween?

D: No! It's the 24th anniversary of the first day of Watergate hearings! Long live Tricky Dick!

J: Now here's a real man! Alright, Dick, you can come in on one condition— you have to leave your mask on. Here, have a seat. (Dick sits) So, I was telling the audience earlier that the Baby Boomer generation is the source of our modern malaise— wouldn't you agree?

D: Let me contact Nixon for an answer.

J: You can communicate with him?

D: Yes, but it's funny— he doesn't want to talk about politics. After Nixon died he went into therapy— it's done wonders for his self-esteem. He and Pat are even making love again.

J: Without bodies?

D: No; apparently they've taken to possessing Bill and Hillary in their intimate moments.

J: I thought Hillary Clinton was frigid?

D: She is. Hillary is a prostitute working the red-light district of Washington.

J: Is she attractive?

D: Richard says she looks like Nancy Reagan, but thinner.

J: Can I ask you a personal question?

D: What?

J: Do you have any allegorical significance?

D: No, I'm a cipher.

J: Sorry to hear it.

D: The pay's good and I'm going to write a posthumous memoir.

J: Will it sell?

D: Richard's BIG in purgatory.

J: So the Catholics are right?

D: No- in heaven that's what they call New Jersey.

(Knock on door—James answers—Attractive middle-aged Anne Bancroft type)

J: Who're you? You better not try to sell me something!

C: I'm Claire Avon and I'm sleeping with your son!

J: Well then you better come right in and tell me all the juicy parts!

D: Ha! Ha! Ha! It's just like "The Graduate"! Richard loves that one! "Here's to you, Mrs. Robinson, Jesus loves you…"

J: (cutting him off) That's enough, Dick. Have a seat, Claire.

C: There are no chairs.

J: I didn't say have a chair, Claire!

C: (seating herself on the floor) Your son is ruining my life!

D: Wait…I feel Richard coming…yes! He wants to say…Claire…your…you can't say that, sir, you're a President!

C: (approaching Dick) You can communicate with spirits?

D: Just Richard Nixon. Why do you think I'm so happy all the time?

J: Alright, Claire, obviously you want me to help you, and you're certainly well made up. In fact, I'm not sure where the makeup stops and you start.

C: Your son is mad— he's always kicking and punching and screaming and yelling!

J: Then why don't you have any bruises?

C: He doesn't hurt me— he just punches and kicks aimlessly, and in public places too. It's embarrassing!

D: So why don't you leave him, and then you can…Mr. President!

C: I can't leave Andre…he's the most considerate lover I've ever had!

(At this point, the action freezes. Elmer appears onstage again, still clad in boxers. He snaps his fingers and Claire, James, and Dick collapse. Elmer sits center stage, Indian style.)

E: That scene was going downhill fast, and now here I am because the playwright wants to jar you. (Rising, bellowing) My friends are dead! The band is over! No more cocaine! No more groupies! No more amps that go to 11 and MTV Music Awards with Courtney Love! (he snaps his fingers)

(C, J, D rise to their former positions)

J: (advancing to Claire) Well, why don't you just…

(Elmer snaps— C, D, J collapse)

E: I wonder if I could get these idiots to sing the Doors. (Addressing them) When I snap my fingers, you will all become Jim Morrison simultaneously. (He snaps his fingers)

(J, C, D rise, link arms, line dance, singing "Come on baby light my fire" twice— the third time, Elmer snaps his fingers and they collapse again.)

E: It seems I have complete control over these people onstage— but how much control do I have over you? I want you all to laugh at me. Do it!...Do it! It's just a game, right? I don't care what you do. It's every man for himself, cause this is war! Everything's a fight these days, isn't it? We've got to fight evil! Fight racism! Free the Tibetan monks!

(James rises indignantly)

J: Now wait a minute, boy— those are my lines!

E: You're the only one allowed to fight evil?

J: Wake Richard Nixon up, too.

E: Richard Nixon can't wake up. That's what being Richard Nixon means!

J: (attacking him) Why you little…

(Action freezes. Homer and Omar appear onstage, normally dressed. They snap their fingers and James and Elmer collapse.)

H: When we die, the play's over.

O: Pretty existential, isn't it?

H: Not if you look at it metaphysically.

O: Which means?

H: We're actors playing a scene. "Actor" is just a personalization of action, and everyone is performing an action at all times.

O: Even Richard Nixon?

H: No— we're talking about the living.

O: What about a Republican like George Bush?

H: Again, no— we're talking about the living.

O: So what action is George Bush performing at all times?

H: Masturbation.

O: But aren't the dead, just by not living, performing a sort of negative action?

H: Ask Keith Richards.

O: We sound like we're in a Tom Stoppard play.

H: No, not a Tom Stoppard play, THE Tom Stoppard play.

O: He's only written one?

H: Yes— the rest he just sort of threw up.

O: That's an action.

H: Isn't Tom Stoppard not an actor?

O: That's true.

H: Affirmation— twenty-love!

O: What?

H: You called?

O: Huh?

H: We're playing the question game.

O: Explanation— twenty-all!

(Elmer rises, screams, charges between Homer and Omar)

E: Plagiarizing! You're plagiarizing!

H: It's in the script. (he pulls out a copy) Have a look.

E: It's a sham! It's a travesty of a mockery of a mockery of a sham!

O: That's plagiarized too.

E: At least he's honest.

O: Me?

E: No, the playwright.

H: Oh— him.

O: Are we honest?

E: Who knows? There's no plot in this piece and no character development. It's DADA— we're not really anything.

H: That's the playwright talking.

E: I didn't write the play.

O: No one does.

H: How Zen.

E: Shall we meditate?

(Homer, Elmer, Omar line up at front of stage, close their eyes, assume lotus position. Dick rises.)

D: You have no idea how uncomfortable it is in this mask. I don't know why I accepted this role— I'm not even getting paid. I've spent half of this thing on my back, the other half singing "Light My Fire" and pretending to be a Republican psychic. I have some news for you, folks— there are no Republican psychics.

(Claire rises)

C: And I get to be the Avon lady— real fuckin' funny! I've had the stupidest lines in the whole script!

D: That "considerate lover" bit?

C: I cringed in rehearsal every time I read it. I asked them to edit it out.

D: Are you fucking a teenager?

C: I am a fucking teenager!

(James rises)

J: Why are we all just standing around? This is a play, isn't it? Whoever heard of a play where nothing happens?

C: Well, look, they're meditating.

J: Is that really an action?

D: We talked about this before, didn't we?

C: Someone did.

(J, D, C snap their fingers— E, H, O rise—E, H, O snap their fingers— J, D, C collapse)

E: Do you get the feeling we're not alone here?

H: And why do we keep snapping our fingers?

O: Remember— the other three.

E: Oh, the other three— of course.

H: We're stagnating, guys.

O: I bet they're getting tired of the whole "stand up, collapse" bit.

E: Now wait a minute! Obviously we're here for a reason— they'll be patient— (scanning audience) won't you?

H: Dammit, I've got something in my boot!

O: Does it hurt?

H: He wants to know if it hurts…

(Elmer snaps his fingers—H, O collapse)

E: I know in the script I'm supposed to commit suicide now. Just because this started as a comedy, you thought it would end one? Here's a secret for you, folks— change is absolute. Change is the only Absolute in the Universe! This is LIVING THEATER— it doesn't create a fantasy world for you to lose yourself in— it confronts you with life! Sure it's pretentious, but it's better than some sitcom, right? Isn't art supposed to grab you by the balls? By the neck (screaming) By the throat? (Elmer clutches his neck, choking, collapsing)

END PLAY

September 1998, Arts Building, State College

Mortuary Puppies

(Three men and three women in black robes sit in a semi-circle; a candle sits before them, and a box of bibles. Inverted pentagrams are drawn on their foreheads, and their faces are powdered stark white, black lips. Call them A, B, C, D, E, F)

A: (tearing off his robe to reveal black jeans and tee-shirt) I have no supernatural insight! I can't cast a spell!

B: (pinching his stomach) I'm fat! I eat too much!

C: (rising, miming an Indian rain-dance) You guys take yourselves too seriously. I can't blame you. We're desperate for a leader. (pulling his hood over his head) We're living slumberously. We'd rather surf the Net then the ocean. We'd rather rent movies than make them. Lust is the only thing you can rely on. (crumbling into a heap on the floor, writhing)

D: (approaching C, comforting him with an embrace) Sex dominates our lives, but we don't want to admit it. (she peels hood off C's head and kisses him passionately)

E: (picking up a copy of Playboy from beneath the candle, lighting a page on fire) Look at this shit. Exploitation is rampant.

B: (pointing accusingly at E) You're desperate! You're an accident waiting to happen! (he shrinks away from E, pointing a cross at him)

E: (chasing B around in a circle) Hatred is the spice of life! Your subtle sensibilities are corrupt with bullshit!

F: (coming downstage left, lying flat on ground) Every man harbors a secret desire to be Superman.

D: (rising, tearing off robe to reveal glamorous dress, breaking into a supermodel strut) I am revolver! I am bomb! I am grenade! I can hurt!

E: (walking aimless circles) Like idlers at the funeral of a psychiatrist. (collapsing onto his knees in prayer) Like a pitchfork stuck into eternity's stomach.

F: (frantically doing sit-ups) This was the determinist exercise, intellectualized, spectacle-juiced.

C: (catching D in a full-nelson) This was detrimental planets of chanting, word-place unstymied, climaxed with whoredom!

D: (breaking away from C, spitting on him) This was the court of maybe adjourned, wrestled with casual moaning blizzards!

A: (doing Michael Jackson "moon-walk" downstage) God cooperates with Truth and Justice.

God is millions of uptight people fucking themselves!

B: (taking off his shoes, beating himself in the head with them) God is implements of destruction stewing in vats!

C: (finding a razor, preparing to slit his wrists) God is a spider piercing heaven with venom and menace!

A: (knocking razor out of C's hand) Fuck death! Death is the refuse of flies! (the rest of the group forms a semi-circle around him, begins falling at his feet and feeling him up sensually, lust in their eyes) Death is the pulse of underwater nowhere! (the group begins to sex-pant) Death is the thin arm of ridiculous waving! (the group begins to climax violently) You're all a bunch of babbling crabs! (he breaks from them and they whimper) Let us ride. Let us worship a lesbian gopher. Let us spit our vehemence. (he takes out a copy of the Bible from under the candle; in it are five copies of the poem "bible"; he distributes them; the rest of the group forms a line at the front of the stage and recites this poem)

B, C, D, E, F: bible is stilts for mind-midgets,
brassy as a Barnum poster, three-ringed
bible is black and white silent film
with Valentino Christ presiding
bible holds governments in thrall, muzzles
president's mouth, defecates on judges heads
bible is Godfather ordering a kill,
hovering outside abortion clinic w/ gun
bible is Pat Buchanan riding GOP elephant
towards Bethlehem, stampeding over gays
bible is 700 Club demanding money, bogus
tears in their eyes, TV Jehovahs
bible is King Silence faced w modern ambiguity,
cancerous sewing rage in frail hearts
bible's enemy is artistry,
prophets of longing howling w compassion
bible is fire blowing anger
bible is exclusivity spilling its heinous seed
bible is shelled turtle
bible is vomit of fear
bible is a lie, an ivory toilet;
to shit in it you have to flush yourself

(During the poem, A has been tearing pages from his bible, chewing them and spitting them out. When the poem ends, he tosses the bible into the audience)

A: (approaching the other five, he tips the first in line and they fall, domino style) Somehow I found myself spending time with teenagers in coffee joints. I happened to lose my bearings and had no better place to go.

B, C, D, E, F: (from the floor, doing the wave, in unison) God is a cornball with a draggy scheme!

A: I fucked one of them but I…(weeping) couldn't come!

B, C, D, E, F: (unison, pointing at him accusingly) Sometimes impotence knows best!

A: (regaining his composure, lighting a cigarette suavely) Terrible, how our needy flesh imagines satisfaction in external monuments.

B: (rising, kneeling before A) Shut your eyes and listen— the thread of children's voices will hold our hearts in place, cozy as a hammer's nail or tire tracks on blacktop roads.

C: (rising, kneeling before B) I haven't seen my father in seven years! He jerked off in front of me and brought home porn!

D: (rising, kneeling before C) Precious bulbs bloom form horde together beg!

E: (rising, stripping off his robe in disgust) You guys are fucking ridiculous. Why do you have to make a production out of everything?

F: (rising, facing audience) Emancipate my claustrophobia! Respect my wedding dress! Ponder my teabags! Sleep! (she spits into the audience)

A: (taking F by the neck in a vice-grip) Do you belong to a food group?

F: (fighting A off, wailing) Sleep on sea-sunk nail-beds! Sleep in tart plum wine!

B: (saluting) The President's power is measured in inches! Stars and stripes become a big boner! The bald eagle a flying come-shot! When the President comes, the earth quakes! The President is scrotum-potent!

A: (letting go of F, attacking B) Your head is fuzzy with pussy-dreams!

B: (fighting him off) Saddam Hussein our leather dominatrix! Bush has discovered the joys of jello! Our head of state has a seventh-grade heart!

A: (letting go of B, lighting another cigarette) Butt. Universal emblem of frailty.

D: (approaching him sexily) You should put me in your mouth. I come lit. I don't produce noxious fumes. You can put me out, if you want. (caressing his torso) Quit me. Leave me a butt on your ashtray. Keep my ashes in a vase. Cart me out for the relatives on holidays. Sprinkle me on the Easter turkey. I'll make a hero of you; you don't need cigarettes! (she removes the cigarette from A's titillated lips)

A: (falling on his knees before D, who's now smoking his cigarette) You're the strum of Spanish minstrels, smooth thumbed suck & burst!

B: (hugging himself, shivering) Man holds himself stiff, pretending impotence.

A: (rising from his knees) He is not sleeping. He dares not to dream. His breath comes in little filaments. He fears disease.

C: (clutching his stomach, rocking back and forth) His skirmish is entirely interior. He will die clenched down on some teething ring, bent over from exertion, wishing he had a bolder to push up a hill.

D: (chastising them, hands on hips) This is all exercise. A ruse. A pigeon's quip.

F: (sudden wail) Exit signs get in my eyes! Clocks insult me with nakedness and smoke! Tortures of unmovement! I am the lost quim of Venus!

D: (hissing at F, giving him the finger) I can't handle your vibes. Silence is the climate I aspire to.

A: (approaching D, hand on heart) I can't amend myself any further. What is the great truth of your cock-eyed haunches? Bring out my bastard and love him!

D: (pushing A away, filing her nails) I proclaim myself a feminist scholar! I will not hide amidst the masks of action.

F: (approaching D, pushing A out of the way) From across the room I sense your distance! People who cannot feel are always fugitives! You eschew the possibility of female erection!

A: (throwing F to the ground) Conversation crucifies my pure thrust! Love is my dharma-soap and she's the box!

C: (still clutching his stomach, rocking) We are a generation of matches! We cannot differentiate intelligence from confusion! We are nerves without ending! We feel safest alone!

D: (settling herself in C's lap) Bed you down on rocks of scotch and time. My groove will ride your pale manipulations of phallus!

C: (throwing D off) Reflect is the principle of jellyfish!

D: (angrily, to C) Fuck your three-wheeled baby carriage scruples! You're a mortuary puppy!

C: (slowly, deliberately) I've been rigged with chess-piece brains!

D: (approaching him again, tenderly) Share your flesh, share your heart, make me whole I'll give you part.

C: (resignedly) Sobriety obliterates my supple. There are no rosetta stones in your foam.

D: (kicking him) Bolders are blundering your mountain! Shadows are glistening your shit! Crosses are sucking up your vomit! Life cooperates with pride and abundance! Death cooperates with shy and repentance! (she begins crying)

A: (moving to console, hold her) Love cooperates with everything lovely. Don't feel soft among the steely geniuses who know what to do! You inspired my first published poem, in a dream of supernatural poise! (he wraps D in his arms)

F: (sudden frenzy) Nothing to kill or die for! No religion too!

E: (coming out of trance-sleep) Fuck that! Lennon thought peace was worth dying for, didn't he? He made Yoko into a religion, didn't he? We all heard that!

A: Well, that's love for you. Yoko was his family.

E: (to group) Do you guys believe that?

C: Vestial virgins shrimps and pillars…banana bombs…cocktails of TV static…the thin arm of ridiculous waving! Sins! Window seeds tempt me into comfort!

E: This was a tower-clock striking midnight. This was the bumble of racketing rapids. This was the prick of heroic Hercules! (he produces a copy of the bible) This existed! Ha!

C: (rising, eyes closed) Move! Anywhere! Breathe!

E: (at lip of stage, with blazing eye) Shut your eyes and listen— the thread of children's voices will hold our hearts in place, cozy as a hammer's nail, or tire tracks on blacktop roads…

END PLAY

February 1999, Arts Building, State College

The dawn broke over our bodies

for Jennifer Strawser

The room spun a wide arc, I feigned indifference, compact blue sky tightened, you sighed, I put a silent right hand on your thigh, heavens opened, venom woke, wound itself around us, the dawn broke over our bodies—

Limitless, primitive flower, first flush of power, teenage friction, skirt-chase eyelids, lipstick spasms, ingrained anger, you panted relentless, the dawn broke over our bodies—

Drunken boated, Rimbaud ice cream, I heaved, felt myself burning, bleeding, too-close breath, breasts, I felt you perfectly as an ideal forest, the dawn broke over our bodies—

The leaves died from gyrations down, into a pained place where static passion moved, was moving, we lost it, I hated you for the coming, into the coming day, slobbering dogs, crosses making Christ himself cower, absolving saints, the dawn broke over our bodies—

Our souls' music created sex for its own amusement, passing time, my sex standing for yours, bound in the breathing of stars, cutting into life deeper, space-shuttle hurtling skyward, sports car on receptive freeway, the dawn broke over our bodies—

September 1996, North Halls, State College

Clean

I gave myself an enema the other day,
took some antibiotics.
Thought to myself,
"This is really the poet's
place in the world—
not sitting in some pasture,
not smoking in some bar,
not fucking someone lovely,
not courting Gods or Jesus.

No.

The poet's place
is kneeling down,
naked,
with something
or other
stuck
up his ass,
in a desperate
attempt
to get
clean."

April 1998, North Halls, State College

Prince

Wesley wore silk pajamas—
he looked very regal,
planted before the floor TV.

I would sit next to him,
waiting for the ugly nurses
to feed us our pills, and take our pulses.

He told me about his car,
his mother,
his buddies— the catalogue

of adolescent normalcy—

and you wouldn't think
he was schizophrenic,
listening to him speak.

In fact, I thought
he was a prince,

Albeit one who was,
like most princes,

at the mercy of his servants.

May 1998, Paul Smyers bookstore, State College

Disappear

The bleached blonde shook
the two white bowls together,
one atop the other,
making a Caesar salad.

Another bleached blonde, my
girlfriend,
watched me watching
this meticulous process.

Dug her engine-red
nails into
the sweet secrecy
of my inner thigh,

Saying, wordlessly,
"If you think that's
a good trick,
You should see me
disappear
sometime."

May 1998, Shlow Library, State College

Song for Genevieve

Flip-flop her legs (so soon!) are perfect
    Sunlight burnishes her kneecaps
She's a swan of smoothness
    A mint to be dissolved in (strong!) tea
An oyster to be de-pearled w/ two hands

(Yawning
gape
of coagulated
sunset—

Perpetual cricket
buzz sticks
to pure ancient
leaves in breezes—)

She's poignant, pained, church-stained
Gravy-lust, the merchandise of sailors (tides!)
Orally injected (wet!) anti-depressants
You're killing me (Hepburning my body!)
Spread a flag over yr naked back, arch—
over the wall— push!— over the sky;
Stars, planets, universes yarned in a spin;
Navigate the (gated!) grave of the Milky Way;
Eat the chocolate donut of midnight—

Fall 1998, West Nittany Avenue, State College

Song for Maria

My scarlet letter let you in
We rallied on our separate beds
The way to blue was flushed with ice
Your tongue possesses everything

(lighten my,
watch my,
blow my)

In any case, the case is closed
We walk the streets, a trackless train
My verdant prayer is your own skin
I can't believe I'm free again

Relax—

Ice yr drink—

Think—

Pursue a purpose, lost in flame
Become the scum you dote on, crab
The sky, the ground, the square you are
The realm of flesh is one lone purge…

mercy mercy mercy
mercy mercy

Fall 1998, West Nittany Avenue, State College

Credits

Song for Maria was published in The Argotist Online (UK) in 2005 and re-published in P.F.S. Post in 2025.

Song for Genevieve was published in hutt (Australia) and Starfish in 2005.

Prince and *Disappear* appeared in Hinge Online in 2001.

Clean appeared in Siren's Silence Vol. 2 No. 3 in 1998.

Dada Circus was produced by the Outlaw Playwrights in State College, Pennsylvania, on September 24, 1998.

Mortuary Puppies was produced by the Outlaw Playwrights in State College, Pennsylvania, on February 11, 1999.

Answered Prayers and Willard Preachers, in its semi-entirety, was featured on the Art Recess 2 site in 2025.

Clean and *Disappear*, as taped at a 2007 Mipoesias reading in Brooklyn, New York, appeared on PennSound in 2026.